



The Sacramento Union

Since 1851

NEWS: STATE CAPITOL

Michelle Steel: The Calif. GOP's Last, Great Hope

Sacramento Union Staff Report

SACRAMENTO — Throngs of California conservatives have focused their support on a new GOP hero in the state capital; and no, it's not Republican Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger. It's Michelle Steel, the newly elected member of the state Board of Equalization and the right's last hope in Sacramento.

Steel, the wife of former California Republican Party Chairman Shawn Steel, is the only conservative member of the GOP elected last November to a constitutional office. And Republicans are rallying around her.

Many conservatives felt cheated by the re-election of Gov. Schwarzenegger and the election of Republican Steve Poizner as California's new insurance commissioner; both men publicly offer left-leaning policy agendas and liberal platforms, forgoing traditional Republican positions.

"When we say that Poizner is a RINO (Republican in Name Only) we really mean it," says Andy Nevis, conservative blogger and California Talkers Editor for The Union. "The guy gave money to The Democratic National Committee and the Al Gore recount fund in 2000. He supported the open primary while running for Assembly last year, but opposes it now."

Schwarzenegger's slights against conservatives have been far more public: after the stinging defeat of his reform agenda in the

2005 Special Election, the governor hired a Democrat as his chief of staff, began appealing liberals in the State Legislature and recently introduced a costly, left-leaning universal health care package for California.

"Every time I think about how Republicans and people like Sean Hannity gave support to Arnold Schwarzenegger, most without making a formal 'endorsement,' I get so ticked. Because I knew these days would come," wrote the "Independent Conservative" at his online blog, www.independentconservative.com.

After the defeat of Republican Sens. Tom McClintock and Charles Poochigian for lieutenant governor and attorney general, respectively, in the November elections, conservatives are eager to support an officeholder like Steel.

Steel has solid conservative resume, with an indisputable right-of-center record from her time as a member of the Tax Advisory Committee for the State Board of Equalization. She also received a number of glowing endorsements, including those from National Taxpayer Advocate Grover Norquist, the California Club for Growth, and Congressman Mike Pence (R-Indiana), chair of the Conservative Caucus.

With such strong support from conservatives, it was no wonder why so many Republicans found themselves at Steel's swearing-in ceremony instead of Gov.



Michelle Steel (pictured) sworn-in by former GOP congressman (and conservative hero) Judge James Rogan in the California Senate Chambers. Steel was elected last November to the California Board of Equalization.

Schwarzenegger's inauguration.

Held Jan. 5 in the State Senate Chambers, Steel's oath of office was administered by former GOP congressman (and conservative hero) Judge James Rogan. State Republican leaders packed the chamber, with McClintock leading the parade of

conservative dignitaries and Republican Assembly Caucus Chairman Bob Huff acting as master of ceremonies. Also in attendance was Byung-Hyo Choi, the Consul General for the Republic of Korea, who voiced his pride that Steel will now serve as the highest-level elected Korean-American in the nation.

A seat on the California Board of Equalization may not sound as prestigious as the other constitutional offices like governor, treasurer or secretary of state, but the position does offer Steel the opportunity to keep an eye on a matter near and dear to the conservative heart: taxes. The five-member board exercises tax administration and fee collection in the state and Steel has vowed to "oppose every new tax and tax increase proposed before the Board of Equalization."

"I promise to always protect taxpayers from an overly aggressive state tax agency. When adjudicating tax disputes, I will always presume that a taxpayer is innocent, until proven guilty," she says. "California's budget should be balanced by eliminating wasteful programs and streamlining massive bureaucracies, not balanced on the backs of hardworking taxpayers."

Editor's Note: After the swearing-in ceremony, Steel's husband, former California Republican Party Chairman Shawn Steel, referred to the Sacramento Union as no longer in operation. The Union forgives the chairman for this faux pas, as he was obviously unaware of the paper's resurgence.